DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 245 860 RC 014 807

AUTHOR Roop, Peter
TITLE Natosi: Strong Medicine. Indian Culture Series: Stories of the Blackfeet.
INSTITUTION Montana Council for Indian Education, Billings.
REPORT NO CE-90; ISBN-0-89992-090-X
PUB DATE 84
NOTE 36p.; For related documents, see RC 014 808-809.
AVAILABLE FROM Council for Indian Education, Box 31215, Billings, MT 59107 ($2.45 softcover; $6.95 hard cover).
PUB TYPE Creative Works (Literature,Drama,Fine Arts) (030) -- Guides - Classroom Use - Materials (For Learner) (051)

EDRS PRICE MF01 Plus Postage. PC Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS *American Indian Culture; American Indian Education; *American Indian History; *American Indian Literature; American Indians; *Childrens Literature; Elementary Education; Instructional Materials; *Reading Materials; Tribes
IDENTIFIERS *Blackfeet (Tribe); Crow (Tribe)

ABSTRACT

Part of a series of stories about the Blackfeet Indians, the illustrated story details the capture of the first horses by the Blackfeet. In the story, young Running Crane is allowed to join a party of warriors who raid a Crow camp for horses. Running Crane uses gentleness to capture a black horse but is separated from the raiding party and must use the horse to escape the Crow and return to his people. (SB)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

Peter Roop NATOSI: STRONG MEDICINE CE-90 Council for Indian Education
ED245860
RC014807

Natosi: Strong Medicine

MAY 1984
RECEIVED
ERIC/CRESS

by

Peter Roop

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

✓ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official NIE position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL IN MICROFICHE ONLY HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Council for Indian Education.
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

CE-90

COUNCIL FOR INDIAN EDUCATION

$2.45

The Council for Indian Education is a non-profit organization devoted to teacher training and the publication of materials to aid in Indian Education. All books published by the Council are selected by an Indian editorial board and are approved for use with Indian children. Proceeds are used for the publication of more books for Indian children.

Editorial committee for this book:

Molly BullShoe - Blackfeet
Zelma DuCharme - Blackfeet
Catherine M. Hall - Blackfeet
Mona Ruth Tatsey - Blackfeet, Sioux
Rosalie Bear Crane - Crow
Therese WoodenLegs - Cheyenne
Esther Peralez Hoffman - Aztec
Lynda LimberHand - Cheyenne
Joy YellowTail Toineeta - Crow
Debbie Voyles - Crow
Marie Reyhner - Navajo
Trisha Hurley
Sue Runkle
Shannon McAuliffe
Jon Reyhner
Karen Van Ettinger
Vicky Cooley
Laurie Butkay
Sherry Oster
Laurie Wilske
Neena Stewart
Hap Gilliland - Editor

Board of Directors, Council for Indian Education:

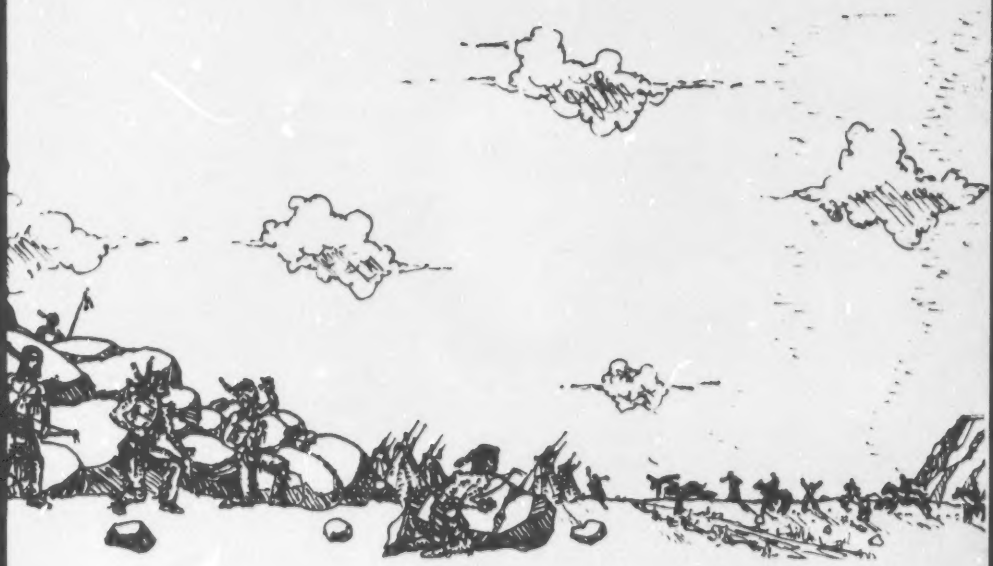
Hap Gilliland - President
Rosalie BearCrane - Vice President
Esther Peralez Hoffman
Therese WoodenLegs
Lynda LymberHand

Heart Butte School Board and Administration:

Roy Johnson - Chairman
Gene Guardipee
Louis Running Crane
Athena Thompson
Bernice White Quills
Frederik Leitch - Superintendent
Jon Reyhner - Bilingual Program Director

Blackfeet Tribe Cultural Review Committee:

Tom Thompson - Chairman
Molly BullShoe
Willie Running Crane



BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Natosi: Strong Medicine

by

Peter Roop

Illustrated by
Shawn Running Crane

Indian Culture Series
Stories of the Blackfeet

Published cooperatively by the
COUNCIL FOR INDIAN EDUCATION
517 Rimrock Road
Billings, Montana 59102
and
HEART BUTTE SCHOOL BILINGUAL PROGRAM
Heart Butte
Blackfeet Indian Reservation, Montana

Copyright © 1984 by
Peter Roop

ISBN--0-89992-090-X

6

Natosi: Strong Medicine

Running Crane watched the last of the fire crumble into the golden coals. The last of his grandfather's guests had left. The boy sat by the old man, listening to the sounds of the Blackfeet camp as it settled down for the night. On a faraway butte a lonely wolf called for companionship.

"Come, my grandson," said Naks'sa. "It is time for you to sleep."

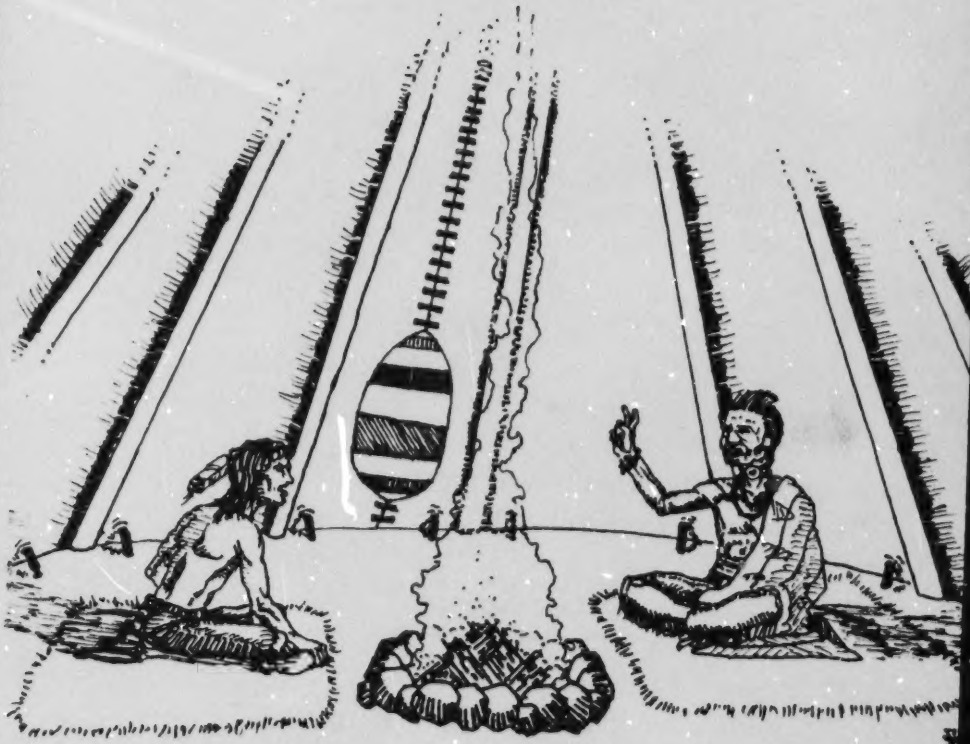
"But Naks'sa," protested Running Crane. "I want to hear once more about the strange elk-dogs."

"I have already told all that I know of these wondrous creatures."

"Then tell me again how large they are. Tell me what they look like. Tell me how a man can climb on their backs and race the winds. Tell me, Naks'sa, please."

"Ha! Running Crane, you will have me talk the moon from the sky," laughed the old man. "First you must put a few more sticks on the fire. Then I will tell you about the elk-dogs."

Running Crane quickly set several small branches on the glowing embers. The dry wood began to burn, filling the lodge with a yellow, dancing light. The old man and the young boy nestled back on their buffalo robes.



BEST COPY AVAILABLE

"Now you know that I have never seen these elk-dogs. I have only heard about them from our friends, on the hunting grounds far to the south. They have seen these elk-dogs in the camps of our enemies, the Crows, who have five of these unusual animals."

The old man paused to pull a blazing stick from the fire. He lit his pipe, puffing out a long stream of grey smoke. Running Crane watched the smoke curl to the top of the tipi.

"These beasts are as big as the biggest elk," continued Naks'sa. "They are used by the white men to carry heavy burdens, like we use our dogs. This is why we call them elk-dogs. But Two Bows, the chief of our southern friends, says that he has seen a man climb on the back of an elk-dog and ride. The elk-dog has long legs and can run like the wind over the prairie grass."

Running Crane was staring at the fire. In the blaze he saw images of the elk-dogs. And he saw himself on the back of the biggest elk-dog running faster than a buffalo.

"These animals have hair all over their bodies. The longest hair is on their necks. They have long, straight tails that swing to the ground. But strangest of all is that no two elk-dogs are the same color."

Running Crane watched his elk-dog image in the fire change. His elk-dog would be black, as black as the middle of the night.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

"These elk-dogs eat grass like the buffalo. And Two Bows said they are gentle and can be guided in any direction by a piece of rope fastened to their jaws."

Running Crane gripped an imaginary rope tightly in his hands. He and his elk-dog could go anywhere that the swift wind could go.

"Now, my young brave, it is time for you to sleep."

Running Crane got up slowly and left the lodge. The old man watched him as he dropped the buffalo hide flap, knowing that these elk-dogs were going to change Running Crane and all his people. Maybe that change would be soon.

Running Crane was up with the sun the next morning. He dashed from the lodge and plunged into the ice-cold river with all the other Blackfeet warriors. The chilly water chased the sleep from his eyes. He scrambled up the bank dripping wet.

"Kii! Running Crane," called Antelope, his cousin. "Let us take our bows and hunt for birds upstream in the cottonwoods."

"No, not today, Antelope. I wish to stay in camp. I want to hear more talk about the elk-dogs. I think there will be a raiding party planned."

"Do you really think that we will steal some of those elk-dogs? The Crows have them, and they are a strong

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

people. They will not let us steal them without a fight."

"Then we must trick them. Let us see what our fathers are saying."

The two young braves joined a group of men making arrows and mending bows. Running Crane's father, Strong Bear, was talking.

"It is a long march to the Crow camp. We will be gone many days."

"We must kill plenty of meat before we go," added another brave.

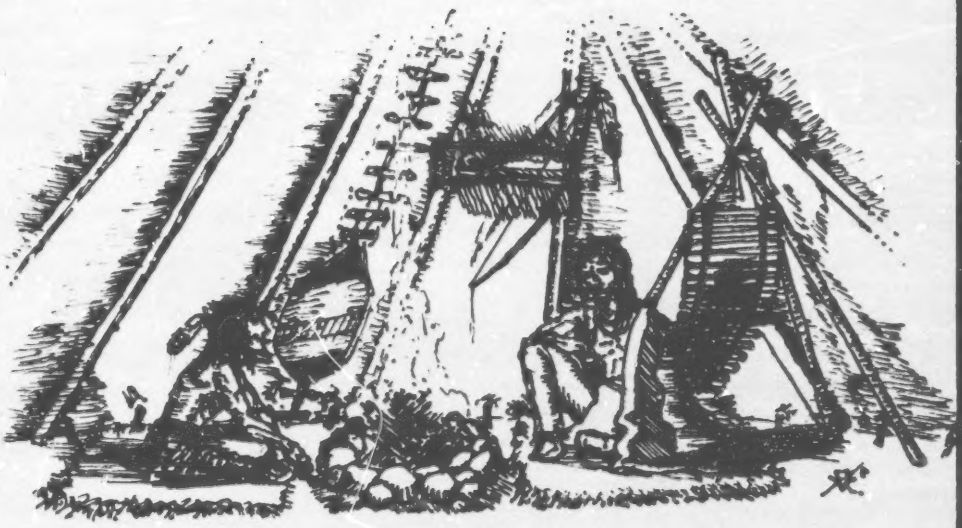
"But we must hurry," said Antelope's father. "The Cold Maker will soon be here and snow will cover the ground."

"Then we will hunt today and tomorrow," said Strong Bear. "We leave for the Crow camp in two suns."

The men soon split up. Running Crane and Antelope followed the winding river upstream and shot four plump partridges. They carried the birds home to camp. There was plenty of meat in every Blackfeet lodge that evening.

The next day Running Crane joined his father on the hunt. They walked far out onto the plains before they saw any buffalo. But no matter how hard they tried they could not get near the great beasts. The wary animals would always run off as they approached. It took much skill and daring to kill a buffalo on foot.

On the way back to camp, Strong Bear shot a deer in a



14

thicket by a narrow stream. When it was skinned the two Indians carried it back to their lodge.

That night Running Crane asked his father the question that had burned inside him all day.

"Father, may I join you on the raiding party tomorrow? I am strong and can walk long distances. I won't complain. I will carry my own food." The words poured out like a running river.

Running Crane's father looked at him for a long time. Then he said, "Can you be as silent as the owl in flight? Can you be as watchful as the antelope? Can you be as cunning as the coyote?"

"Yes, Father, I can be all those things," answered Running Crane.

"I have watched you grow from a small child to an-almost-man. You can track and you can shoot straight. I think it is time for you to join a raiding party. Yes, Running Crane, you may come with us to capture the elk-dogs."

As Strong Bear said these words he looked at Running Crane's mother across the fire. She nodded her head slightly. She was smiling sadly when Running Crane looked at her.

"If you are joining the party tomorrow my son, then you must be off to bed now," she said.

It took Running Crane a long time to fall asleep that

16

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

night. But when he did, he had only one dream. He dreamed of climbing on the back of his elk-dog and racing the wind.

In the morning, as the sun began its long climb through the sky, Running Crane was there, wide-awake, with the other braves. Antelope was there as well.

The Blackfeet warriors traveled for five suns before reaching the land of the Crows. Each night they camped under the star-sprinkled sky. Each day they walked through the canyons and along streams to avoid being seen by any Crow scouts. It wasn't until they climbed a high, steep hill on the fifth morning that Running Crane saw any Crows.

Running Crane gazed down at the Crow camp. The lodges were standing at the edge of a gentle, rippling river. There was not much activity in the camp. The women were scraping hides or tending the many cooking fires. The men were gathered in groups playing games or mending weapons. Children were scattered all over the camp imitating their parents.

But Running Crane didn't care about what was happening in the camp. He wanted to see an elk-dog. His eyes searched the camp for these strange beasts. All he saw were a few roaming dogs.

"Where are the elk-dogs?" he whispered to Strong Bear.

18

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

His father pointed to an open grassy meadow downstream from the lodges. There stood five elk-dogs, heads down, grazing on the tall, sweet grass.

Running Crane stared at the elk-dogs for a long time, his eyes soaking in every detail. They were just as his grandfather had described them, only more beautiful than Running Crane had imagined. They were larger than elks. And their hair was long and each was a different color. Especially one. It was jet black, blacker than the burned-out coals of a camp fire. Running Crane could not take his eyes off this elk-dog. It was bigger and stronger than any of the others. Surely this creature could outrace the winds.

As Running Crane lay watching, several Crow braves left the lodge circle and went to the elk-dogs. Each man carried a short rope with a loop in it. They placed the loops in the mouths of four of the elk-dogs and climbed on their backs.

One brave tried to put his rope into the black elk-dog's mouth. The animal pulled away from the man. Then it pawed the earth and reared back its head. A strange noise came from the beast, a noise that Running Crane had never heard before.

The man struck the elk-dog with a willow branch. The elk-dog reared and kicked at the Crow. The man hit the animal again and grabbed it by the neck. He struggled to

20

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

get the rope into the beast's mouth. When he finally did, the elk-dog reared again. But the warrior held onto the rope. Then the man tried to climb onto the elk-dog's back. Each time the great animal bucked him off.

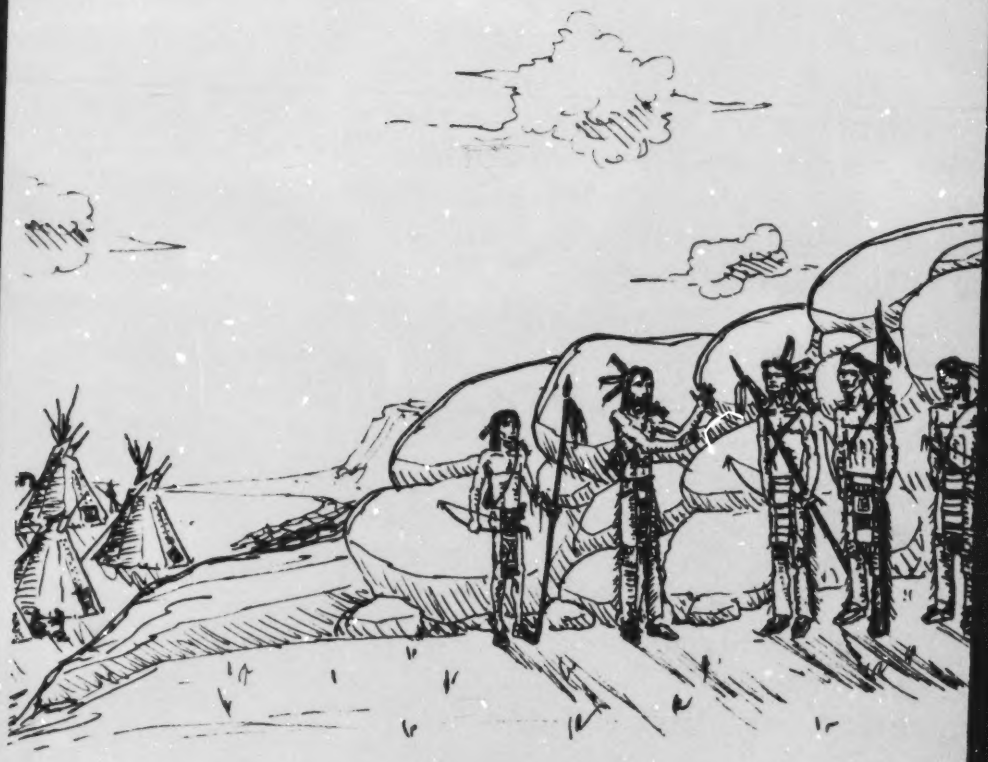
Running Crane ached to steal the black elk-dog and climb onto its back himself. He was sure the elk-dog would not shake him off.

The Blackfeet warriors watched the Crow camp all day. They watched the Crows ride the four gentle elk-dogs, turning them with the ropes in their mouths. All of the elk-dogs could be ridden this way except the black one. No matter how hard the cruel brave clung to the rope, the black elk-dog threw him off.

As the sun rolled out of the sky and dropped behind the Backbone-of-the-World Mountains, the Blackfeet warriors made their plans for the raid that night. There was much discussion about the black elk-dog. It was not gentle like the rest. It would be bad medicine. They would settle for the four gentle elk-dogs.

Running Crane was disappointed. The other elk-dogs were not nearly as magnificent as the black one. But he could not argue against the decision of his elders. He knew, however, that someday he would climb on that broad, black back and fly across the plains.

The plan was for the party to split into two groups. One group would cross the river and attack the Crow



22

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

camp. While they were distracting the Crows, the second group would rush down the steep hill and take the four elk-dogs.

The Blackfeet raiders waited until thick, white clouds covered the moon, cutting off its silvery glow. Then they split up. Running Crane stayed with his father, with the group that would take the elk-dogs. Each person in this group had a rope wound tightly around his arm. The first four to reach the elk-dogs would place the ropes in their mouths and lead them away.

It seemed like forever before Running Crane heard the hoot of an owl, the signal to attack. In the stillness of the night he heard the war cries of the other Blackfeet warriors as they rushed into the Crow camp.

Then, like shadows sneaking down the hill, Running Crane and his group ran to the elk-dogs. As the men approached, the elk-dogs made snorting noises, but they were easily captured. All but the black one. The braves ignored it as they rounded up the four elk-dogs and began leading them back up the hill.

Running Crane hesitated, watching the great black elk-dog paw the ground. Without thinking he ran to it and reached out to touch the smooth coat. The animal shivered as the boy felt its flank. Once trained by a kind warrior, the elk-dog responded to Running Crane's gentle touch, making a strange, soft neigh at the boy. Suddenly,

24

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Running Crane heard a cry.

"Haiii!"

Running Crane spun in time to see a Crow warrior charging at him like a ghost from the night. It was the cruel owner of the black elk-dog, clutching a long, sharp knife in his hand.

Running Crane ducked as the blade flashed towards him. The blade slashed the night air, missing Running Crane. But as he turned to avoid the blade, Running Crane fell down. The Crow warrior towered above him, an evil grin covering his face.

Just as Running Crane expected the knife to plunge through his heart, the black elk-dog reared on its hind legs. Its hooves shot through the air, striking the cruel Crow on the shoulder. He came crashing down beside Running Crane, hitting the ground with a thud. Running River sucked in his breath. The warrior lay motionless in the grass.

Running Crane jumped up and ran to the elk-dog. The great black animal let the boy rub his face in the long hair on its neck. Then slowly, as he whispered to the elk-dog, Running Crane uncoiled the rope from his arm and put it into the animal's mouth. The elk-dog stood still as he had been trained to do.

Behind him Running Crane could hear the sound of more Crow warriors approaching. He flung himself onto

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

the broad back. The elk-dog shivered again but didn't throw the boy.

Running Crane turned the elk-dog as he had seen the Crows do with the gentle elk-dogs. He touched his heels to the smooth flanks. This was how the Crows had made their elk-dogs go forward. The great black elk-dog trotted up the hill.

When Running Crane reached the summit he expected to meet his companions. But the top of the hill was empty. The raiders had already moved off into the night to escape the angry Crow warriors.

"Well, my friend," said Running Crane. "You saved my life tonight. Now we are left alone. Let us run far in the dark so that the Crows cannot reach us. Then tomorrow we will go to my camp."

The elk-dog snorted, tossing its head. Running Crane touched his heels to the animal's flanks and the two disappeared into the night.

The boy and the elk-dog kept going until the moon began falling from the sky. They entered a thicket of pines and Running Crane tied the elk-dog to a small tree. Then the tired young Blackfeet warrior fell asleep on the soft bed of pine needles.

When Running Crane awoke, he took the elk-dog out into the tall, green prairie grass. The boy stood back and watched the animal snatch huge mouthfuls of grass and

28

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

eat them. His own stomach growled and felt empty as an old cooking pot. Yet before he filled his stomach, Running River wanted to see the elk-dog run. He would hunt along the way home.

After the elk-dog had eaten his fill, Running Crane swung himself onto the animal. He patted the long, strong neck and said, "I will call you Pah-poom, the Blackfeet word for lightning. For even though you are as black as the night, you must be as fast as the jagged lightning."

Pah-poom bobbed his head as if he understood. Running Crane patted his neck again.

"Now let us see just how fast you can run!"

He kicked Pah-poom in the flanks as he had seen the Crows do. Like an arrow pulled to full bow, Pah-poom sped over the ground. Running Crane clung to the great neck with all of his strength. The earth spun beneath him. Running Crane wondered if the elk-dog would ever stop.

The big beast gradually slowed and began trotting again. Running Crane learned how to make Pah-poom respond to his commands. The two galloped, trotted, and cantered all day.

Towards sunset hunger began to get the best of Running Crane.

"Now we must find some food for me, Pah-poom. You can eat like the buffalo but I, a Blackfeet warrior must eat

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

the buffalo."

The two crossed the top of the next butte. Far below Running Crane saw a herd of buffalo grazing on the lush grass near a stream. It was a small herd mostly cows and calves. He started to climb off of the elk-dog's back, then he had an idea.

"Come, Pah-poom. You can run like the wind. Let's see if you can run like the buffalo!"

Running Crane kicked Pah-poom into action. The two streaked down the hill. The buffalo were too startled to move at first. Then one old bull began running and the rest charged after him. Running Crane kept his eyes on a small calf running at the rear of the herd.

"Go, Pah-poom! If you can catch that calf I too will fill my stomach tonight," he shouted to the elk-dog as they thundered along. Pah-poom's hooves beat the earth with the rapid, heavy thump of a war drum.

Before Running Crane could get his arrow to his bow the speeding elk-dog had caught up with the calf. Running Crane held on tightly with his knees while he pulled his bow back with all of his strength. The arrow shot from the bow, hissing like a hornet. It went straight, hitting the buffalo just below the shoulder. The calf stumbled, crashing to the ground.

Pah-poom turned and trotted back to the fallen buffalo. The calf wasn't dead so Running Crane killed it

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

quickly with his knife.

That night, as he ate the buffalo's kindey, Running Crane knew that he had never tasted meat so good. It was his first buffalo kill and he already had plans for the soft skin. He would make a soft, strong rope for Pah-poom. The rest he would give to his mother to make new moccasions.

In the morning, Running Crane finished skinning the buffalo. He loaded the meat onto the elk-dog's back.

"Pah-poom, you are more than an elk or a dog. You are strong medicine. You must be a friend of the Sun's. Let us now ride to my people's camp."

The sun had reached the middle of the sky when Running Crane and Pah-poom galloped into the Blackfeet camp. A great cry went up from all of the lodges. Running Crane rode the elk-dog to his grandfather's tipi. The old man stood gazing at the two for a long time.

Then he called in his loudest voice for a feast that night to celebrate the capture of the elk-dog and the return of his grandson.

Running Crane's father's face broke into a great smile when he saw his son for he had thought him slain by the Crows. The rest of the raiding party returned just before sunset, driving their elk-dogs before them.

That night there was much rejoicing in the Blackfeet

camp as the story of the raid was told. But no one in the lodge circle was as happy as Running Crane. He had chased the wind and the buffalo. He had returned from his first raid safely and had killed his first buffalo.

Pah-poom was indeed strong medicine.

TO THE READER

This is one of a series of stories of the Blackfeet Indians which take place when the Blackfeet were at the height of their power, hunting buffalo north to the North Saskatchewan River, south to the Yellowstone river, east to the Montana North Dakota border, and west to the Rocky Mountains, and raiding far beyond. The Blackfeet people still live in the heart of this territory, in Southern Alberta and North Central Montana.

Little Blaze and the Buffalo Jump is about Blackfeet life before the coming of the horse.

Natosi: Strong Medicine is a story of the capture of the first horses by the Blackfeet.

Quest for Courage is a novel of Blackfeet life in the early 1800's, when life centered around horses and buffalo, and the Blackfeet had become one of the most powerful tribes on the northern plains. Lame Bear, a boy who has been crippled by a broken leg, overcomes his handicap in the pursuit of a wild stallion which has eluded the greatest of warriors.

Sik-ki-mi is the story of a Blackfeet boy who faces the first steamboat on the Yellowstone while on a raid to bring back a buffalo horse from a Crow camp.

These stories are published cooperatively by the Council for Indian Education and the Heart Butte School Bilingual Program.

order from
COUNCIL FOR INDIAN EDUCATION
Box 31215, Billings, MT 59107

Natosi: Strong Medicine

Running Crane, a Blackfeet youth, joins a raiding party determined to steal from the Crow Indians the first horses in the area now known as Montana. During the raid, he is separated from his companions and must win the confidence of one of these "elk-dogs" to escape and return to his people.